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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Rose Stratton, 75, Maquoketa, Iowa
Karla Ice
Rose Stratton's home in Maquoketa, Iowa
October 21, 2010, 2:00 PM**

Karla Ice: Rosella and I have just met. We don't know each other previously. The purpose of the interview is that it is part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of

Blindness in Iowa, Oral History Project. I need to ask for your oral consent to have the interview recorded.

Rose Stratton: Yes, I sure do.

Ice: Very good. Thank you. First off, may I ask you your age?

Stratton: I am 75.

Ice: Where were you born?

Stratton: In Richmond, Iowa, in a house.

Ice: Okay. What about your family, brothers and sisters?

Stratton: I had six brothers and three sisters and four of them are already gone, the brothers and sisters, and then my parents are both gone, of course.

Ice: So, that was a big family.

Stratton: Yeah it was.

Ice: What was the cause of your blindness? How old were you?

Stratton: I was born with congenital cataracts. I guess you could say that I was born with it, although, my parents never discovered it until I was about three. My mom was too busy to worry about it I think. (Laughter)

Ice: How was it discovered?

Stratton: The neighbor lady came over one night when I was sitting in the high chair and she said – I was the baby at the time – and she said, “What is the matter with that baby’s eyes?” My mom said, “Nothing.” And she said, “Well there is. Look at how close she’s looking at her food.” So, then my parents took me to a, what I would call a glasses doctor, and he said, “Oh my goodness, I wouldn’t touch that kid. She’s only seeing out of a pinhead of light in each eye.” So, he immediately made arrangements for me to go to Iowa City and to have them check the eyes. They did surgery. But, on a baby back in 1930...it was in ’38 when I had it done. They tried to do the cataracts the same way they did to adults, try to roll them off and I had to lay with sand bags beside my head, my arms out straight, my legs tied down, and of course I balled my head off, probably. I don’t really remember that, but I do remember one thing about it is they put me in the men’s ward at the University in Iowa City, because it was right next to the sun porch and all these men came and talked to me. They kept me amused. The doctor said, “The more she can be amused, the less she will cry.” (Laughter) They took the cataracts off, and then about two months later they decided on the right eye they hadn’t taken it off good enough. So, they tried again and in so doing they struck something in the right eye; should have removed it immediately, but back then they were learning. They didn’t know what they were doing; and so they left it alone.

Then when I was seven, I had a younger brother then that was a year old. He and I were kind of wrestling on the bed and he kicked me and knocked my...well my mom thought he knocked my eye out, but what he did was just

punched the skin and stuff around the eye. My parents immediately rushed me to Iowa City, and they removed the eye right away. That was when I was seven. The reason it came to that bad knock was because, that was the year of 1942, and Iowa City always came to the school. I was in Vinton; it was my first year. They always came to the school in the fall and in the spring, and they did not come that spring because they had to go in the service. So, the doctors didn't come. So, that's why it was not discovered. But, what had happened is the eye had grown, and what he kicked was just the skin and stuff around to make it bleed and stuff. So, then they had to remove it. It didn't bother me to have it removed.

Ice: What about your education experiences?

Stratton: Okay, my first experience of going to Vinton, I didn't like. I was up playing in the park. In these small towns there was always a park. I was up playing at the park with a bunch of kids and all of a sudden somebody came up and said, "You gotta come home, there's a lady down here wants to talk to you." Well, I didn't want to go. I kind of knew what was coming. (Laughter) I had started to Catholic school, but I couldn't do the work because I couldn't see well enough. I think it was Mrs. Holmes maybe from the Department for the Blind. She said my mom and dad had consented that I would be going to Vinton to school in the fall. I wasn't very happy, of course. But after I got to school I loved it. I loved school. I was there twelve years. They started me in 1st grade because I was a big girl. I was too big for kindergarten, and then I had already started in 1st

grade and I guess I was smart enough to be in 1st grade, I'm not sure. But I went clear through 12th grade.

Ice: What all kinds of classes did you have there? Any that stand out particularly in your mind?

Stratton: No not really, although back then they had like Industrial Arts, where you could weave rugs and make baskets and cane chairs and things like that. I loved to weave rugs. I made a lot of rugs. When I graduated, what they do is sell these to people and then you get a percentage when you graduate; you get that percentage of what you sold. I think I had close to \$100.00, which was a lot of money back then. (Laughter) So I was tickled.

Ice: Yes. Any particular teachers that stand out in your mind who were particularly influential?

Stratton: Yes, I think Louise Smith was a very, very good teacher. Of course my teachers are all dead now. She was very influential. I had a teacher, his name was Mr. Bodnar. I had a problem in school that I thought some of the other kids were favored, you know, some of the sighted, more sighted kids were favored over the rest of us. I guess that always bothered me. He was a Speech Therapist. He said there is absolutely nothing wrong with your speech, but you need counseling. So, once a week I had to go see him. He saved my life. Because of him I turned out much better than without him.

Ice: Very good. You had the regular academics classes, plus you had Braille and things.

Stratton: Typing. I loved typing. I did Dictaphone. I passed the Dictaphone test, but I didn't think that would be my life. I didn't think I wanted to sit in an office all day.

Ice: So you learned blindness skills there, Braille and cane travel?

Stratton: I've never had cane travel. I guess, you know, I always felt I saw well enough. When I'm in Cedar Rapids, which I'm not very often anymore; that's where my parents moved to when I was eight. They moved to Cedar Rapids. When I used to go downtown and things like that, I used to carry a cane because that's a lot busier town. This town isn't very busy, you know. I never felt that I needed a cane here. So, I never had cane travel.

I don't know...you talk about learning Braille skills and things, but I don't know what are skills because I just do it the way I do it. I've always done it that way, so it may seem like a Braille skill to a sighted person, but to me it doesn't.

Ice: Okay. When you were at the Vinton School back then did you go home on weekends?

Stratton: Yes, you could go home whenever you wanted to go home back when I was in school. But I had an older sister who moved back home with three kids, and it just made too many bosses at my house. I'm sorry, but you know with all the rest of the kids there and then my sister, who was kind of bossy. The lighting in my house at home, of course, was not as good as the lighting at school. If I broke a glass or something, she'd growl at me. Well, my mom

didn't. Mom was so busy, you know, with everybody and so my mom would send me money to come home on the bus but I would tell her, "But mom, I can't come. We have a dance this weekend." We had a lot of social things to do. That was...I didn't want to miss any of them. So, I didn't go home real, real often. I went home for Thanksgiving and Christmas and Easter and summer. But when I went home in the summer, you're going to laugh, but when I was younger I used to put my suitcase out in July and start packing because I was ready to go back.

Ice: That speaks very well for Vinton.

Stratton: I loved school. I loved the life. I had two neighbor girls that were around my age, but we just didn't get along. We just...they were different than me. They were different than me. I think that's what I've got to say about the school at Vinton. Everybody there was the same. They were there for the same reason, because of their eyes and nobody made fun of you. I feel bad when the school was done.

Ice: How many were in your class?

Stratton: Well, in my class when I graduated, there were only six of us. That's why you get a good education because it's very one-on-one. Of course, there were bigger classes. At the time I was graduated, I believe there was around 150 or so in school. So there were bigger classes. Mine was a smaller class. I was the Valedictorian, if that means anything. If that means anything with six people. (Laughter)

Ice: Anything else you'd like to share about your experience at Vinton?

Stratton: Well, I made my school life fun. I used to babysit for...at that time the teachers and principle and superintendent all lived on campus, at that time. I used to babysit because I came from a big family. I needed the money, you know, to be truthful. My mom would send me a dollar and say, "Don't spend it all in the same place." By the time you bought your monthly needs, that was the end of that one. So, I earned money. I babysat for the Principal and for the Superintendent, and then when I was in high school, I don't even remember what year I started, but I used to go over every morning at 6:00 and help get the little boys up and get them dressed for breakfast, and then at 4:00 I would go and play with them for an hour. See I was busy earning money, forty cents an hour. (Laughter) But gee, that went a long way back then.

I did make school fun. I think I made it fun for everybody else because I'm still hearing about it when I...every year when Halloween came, I would say to the girls...we were in high school and I would say, "Come on, we're going to go trick-or-treating tonight." They'd say, "Oh, come on, we can't do that." I'd say, "Oh, yeah we can; I'll show you how." So we would sneak out...we had a tunnel between the two buildings, our building and the main building where all the teachers lived. So, we would go through the tunnel, before it was locked up on our end; and so we would go through the tunnel and then we'd go over to the teacher's places and go Trick or Treating. They didn't think anything of it. There was about four of us. I always had to go first. I didn't care. I was kind of a leader.

15:00

Stratton: So, then we'd get all done and I'd say, "Okay, now we're going to go up to the Superintendent..." "Oh no, we can't go up there!" I said, "Oh, yes we can. I babysit there and they will, probably will give us something good."

(Laughter) They didn't really like the idea, but they went with me. Somebody said, "How did you get back in to the building?" I said, "I knew the night watchman, because when I babysat he used to have to walk me through the tunnel and open the door for me to go through. So, I knew he wouldn't tell on us and he didn't. **(Laughter)** He took us on through and let us in the building and we got back in there. **(Laughter)** We had fun. It was fun.

Ice: After you left Vinton, you were employed?

Stratton: I was home and then I babysat. I went to this one house and took care of this little boy and this little girl. As a matter of fact, she was an ex...he was the coach, high school coach, and she was his wife, but he had since then divorced her. She moved to Cedar Rapids with her two kids, and so I babysat them every day for her.

Then after that I finally, it took me awhile, I finally got a job at the Troy Laundry [Correction: New Process Laundry] in Cedar Rapids. I was with the dryers. I had seven dryers right behind me. What you did is, each family, or each whatever, came in a bag and you put this bag...you opened this bag and dumped it in the dryer, put the ticket up on top and then when it was dry you folded it and wrapped it up in a paper and taped this ticket on the outside so they'd know

where it went. I had seven dryers, but I got really smart at doing that too, because a lot of them were like for industrial places; like he'd have mops and stuff and all you did with them was just dry them and just threw them back in the bag. I'd have a couple of dryers going with that kind of stuff. That way it wouldn't get way ahead of me. I didn't mind that job, but it was hard work and I'd keep saying, "I need help." She'd say, "No you don't, just work a little faster." And I would; it made me mad so I'd work faster. But I liked it. But it wasn't a lot of money. I did enjoy the work because I was working.

And then the Department found me a job at Collins. Mr. Rucker found me my job at Collins. I worked in the deburring section. That was just like...each person had their own, like, table type desk that you sat at and you had your own toolbox with tools. You took the burrs off the stuff. I have to tell you one incident. I liked that work. You got really dirty but that didn't bother me. I just was happy that I was making some of my own money. We had an inspector that I just thought the world of him; he was so good. But if you did a new job and you didn't know for sure if you were doing it right, after you did one piece then you had it checked by him. One day I looked all over for him and I could not find him nowhere. That afternoon he finally stopped at my...then he went around, too, and he stopped at my table and I said, "Where have you been all day?" And he said, "I've been here." And I looked down and I said, "Oh you wore different shoes today!" That's what I evidently was finding him by. I didn't realize that. (Laughter) They were light colored and these were dark that he had on. That's why I didn't recognize him. So, we had a good laugh over that one. But I did, I loved my work.

Ice: How long were you there?

Stratton: Six and a half years.

Ice: Was that during the time when Mr. Collins was still there and running the company?

Stratton: Yes that was before Rockwell.

Ice: Did you have any occasion to see him?

Stratton: No, no I didn't get to see him.

Ice: What about relationships with other employees. Were any of them...

Stratton: I had good relationships. I had very good friends. Everybody was very good to me. They would, you know, when you finished a job, you'd go up to this...it was like a rack...and it had boxes on there. Each one had a job in it. They were...got so they helped me find the jobs they knew I could do. Because of course there were some I couldn't do. I'll admit that. But they were very good about finding jobs and I had one lady that always filled out my time card. But no, I had very good...I made lots of good friends. Matter of fact I still talk to one of the girls I worked with. I had good friends there.

Ice: So, there weren't people that questioned your ability to do the job because of your vision?

Stratton: No, never. Never, no.

Ice: Anything else you want to comment about your work at Collins.

Stratton: No. I liked it. I loved it really. The first day I went and for the first week I thought, "Oh my word. How am I going to stand all of this noise?" Pretty soon it was nothing. You just got used to it. Boy that was terrible, the noise.

Ice: I bet. Okay. You left Collins then, after six and a half years?

Stratton: Yeah, in 1968 I got married and Bob was working at Clinton Engines here in town and so, of course, I came too. Then I was just...Just...I was a housewife then, and I don't remember when I started babysitting. It wasn't a heck of a long time after that, that...well lets see...the oldest girl that I babysat for [Leslie], she is 37 now. It didn't take me too long to start. The mother questioned me, she said, "Oh I think I'll have somebody else take care of her." I said, "Okay, whatever." Well she didn't think I was capable, I guess, because of my eyes. Well when the child was...this other girl had her and once her mother called me and she said, "Would you still consider taking less and babysitting her?" I said, "Oh you think I can?" She said, "I know you can. She's not happy where she's at and I'm not either." I said, "Well, once and a while I like to take off a day and go see my mom in Cedar Rapids or something like this." And I said, "Will that be ok?" "That will be fine." Everything I said to her was fine. She just wanted me to have her. And I watched that girl until she was 11, when they moved to

Philadelphia. She still calls me and writes to me. She's just a sweetheart. I took care of her little sister too.

But, I counted one day and I had watched 38 kids all together...not at the same time...altogether since when I started babysitting here. I made a lot of good money doing that, and I enjoyed it. My kids never ran away, I had a swing set and things out in the yard, which I don't...I got rid of. But, they would stay right on the playground equipment and the older ones helped with the little ones. But see, that's the way I was raised too. We had a good, good time.

Ice: So, how did you keep track of them all?

Stratton: Whenever they went outside, I went outside too. They never...Oh, a couple times I'd let a couple of the older, who were like four, go outside, but not anybody any littler than that without me. It was so funny, when they all had to be quiet for an hour after dinner. If they went to sleep fine, if they didn't that's all right, but they had to be quiet. They were...they were good. Then at about 3:30 or 3:00, or something like that, it was treat time. I had a plastic runner that was in front of my davenport, and that's where they all sat. I gave them each a little mixing cup with some treats in it. Like maybe there were M & M's, maybe there were marshmallows, maybe there were raisins, different kinds of things in it. And boy, they all looked forward to those treats. (Laughter) It was very nice.

We would go for a lot of long walks; they all loved to go for long walks. I kidded them, I'd say, "Now don't walk too close to that drain because you know there is something...a frog down there and he's going to reach up and grab your leg." (Laughter) They believed that. We had a good time. I

had an old type stroller, and I had one in the seat and one sat on a little pillow in the back, two kids would...one would hang on each side of the stroller and two of them would walk ahead of me. I had all six of them under control.

Ice: Yes, that was a good plan.

Stratton: But I'll tell you one day uptown...but kids, they can say the darndest things sometimes. One day we had bought a couple of box springs, I think it was, at this one furniture store that we used to have. I was going to go pay the bill off and so, of course, I took all six kids with me. When we went to go in the store one of the older ones says, "Oh! Look at all of those crickets!" I said, "Be quiet." And they said, "Well Rose you can't see them but there's a whole bunch of them right here." I said, "Just walk on by, there probably dead and they aren't going to hurt you." So, as we walked down the aisles, the one said, "Look at that cricket, he's sitting right on that chair like he just like he owns it." (Laughter) So, I get them to the back, where you had to go and pay, and I said, "Now just sit down..." They were aggravating me by then. And I said, "Sit down here and behave." "Do you think we're going to sit on that floor?" I said, "No, I suppose you're not." (Laughter) So, I got the bill paid and we left. (Laughter) Kids don't care what they say, but they're truthful.

Ice: Were there ever times when you suspected they were trying to get by with something because you wouldn't notice?

Stratton: No, they sure didn't. No, my kids were very, very good.

Ice: Un-huh. Anything else about the babysitting, childcare?

Stratton: No, I enjoyed it. I was never fortunate enough to have any kids of my own, and I really enjoyed taking care of the kids. I still talk to at least four of them, that I babysat for.

Ice: How old were most of them when you were babysitting them?

Stratton: Oh, lot of them...a couple of them I had when they were two months, three months old and then started out. And some of them came when they were, like, a year old, two years old, something like that. Usually, there were two in the same family. I'd have one and then another one would be born, and I would have that one too. It seemed like I had two from each family, it seemed like, usually.

I quit babysitting...when I quit babysitting my heart was absolutely broken because never, never, ever would believe when people say, "Oh, you are the best babysitter. My kids just love you. There isn't anything they wouldn't do for you." Don't ever believe anything like that.

Because one day this woman...I found out why she did it. She worked for the Social Welfare Department; of course she dealt with what we call Sunshine School, here. That's where kids go to school. It's just like a daycare, but she brought her kids to me. She had a little girl and a little boy. And the little boy when he was...from the time he was...I don't even remember how old he was when I got him, but he

always had ear infections. At that time, Bob was laid off by then, so either Bob or I would sit and rock him. We rocked...we had those kids like nine hours a day. We would rock him because he was so fussy. Well, of course, he got so he loved us, you know. Anyhow, one day the mother came and said to me as she was picking up her kids, "Well, I'm not going to bring my kids back because I'm going to take them to Sunshine School." I said, "What?" And she said to me, "Rose, you love my kids too much, and you pay too much attention to them." I said, "How can anybody love a child too much and pay too much attention to them?" Boy, I cried; I cried for two weeks. And Bob says, "You're not going to take care of any more." I said, "No, I'm not. I can't go through this again." I didn't. That was when I was through. I found out that they were heckling her about not bringing her kids to Sunshine School. That's where she took them. Someone told me that worked there, "Oh, that little boy cried every day. He wanted to go to Rose's house."

30:00

Stratton: I lost all contact with them. About a month after she took them away she came back and brought them back to see me and that little boy, oh he just came running to me. I said, "Ann, please tell me the truth, why did you do that?" And she said, "Well I don't know." I said, "I know, because you were jealous of the way that little boy loved me." "Oh I was not. No, take them, let them play. I'm not going to question you any more." But I knew what it was. Because he would do anything that I would ask him to do, and he'd never do anything she asked him to do. So, I always told

everybody, don't believe what everybody tells you when you're good. (Laughter)

Ice: I think you mentioned also you were involved with Cub Scouts?

Stratton: Webelos, yes. My husband always had a love for Cub Scouts. Way back when, before I was ever married to him, he was the only blind Cub Scout leader over the whole troop with all sighted kids in the world. He was the only one. There was an article written on him about that. So, they were looking for a Webelo leader and, which is kids 11 and 12, boys 11 and 12. So, we decided we'd do it. We had a good time doing it with the kids. As a matter of fact, one of the things to get a badge you had to camp out. Well we knew that no parents would allow us to take their kids down by a river or something like that. I don't blame them; I wouldn't either. So, we camped out in our back yard. Oh brother. (Laughter) It was really hot that night, and so I stayed in the house. Of course I wasn't the scout, see I stayed in the house and Bob slept with one little boy. And, he said, "Of all kids for me to stay in the pup-tent with, he had his alarm clock and it went off at 5:00 so he could deliver his papers." (Laughter) But, then they fix their own breakfast. One of the mothers furnished rolls, and somebody brought some eggs and they wanted to fry their own eggs. So, we let 'em do it out here in back and we had a good time. We played a lot of games and I think they enjoyed it, and so did we.

Ice: Anything you want to comment about other leisure activities or community activities?

Stratton: Well, Bob and I had a cottage at Leisure Lake, which is about 20 miles northwest of here. We went for 24 years. Every weekend somebody would take us up and on Sunday they'd come and pick us up. We first had a trailer, and that got blown down by a tree. The tree fell right on the top of that and smashed it. So, then we had a fellow who volunteered, of course we paid him to build us a cottage. We built a beautiful...it was a beautiful cottage with a big deck. One boy built a wooden sidewalk from the bottom of the steps down to the dock. We had a couple of posts and with a rope, so that you could take a hold of the rope and not loose your way. 'Cause we were right on the lake. We loved it. We fished, we swam, we canoed, we boated. It was good for all of us, for both of us. It just almost got too much after awhile because the hills got deeper and deeper. We sold that in '06, right before bob died. Thank goodness we got it done. Yes, that was a lot of our...that was most of our free time was spent doing that.

Ice: I suspect there were other friends up there who were in the same neighborhood...

Stratton: Oh yeah. Lots of people. Oh yeah. Matter of fact, I still talk to a couple of them that were there then.

Ice: What about any changes you have seen in technology or the way things are done over the years?

Stratton: (Laughter) I'm not sure I like modern technology, if you wanted to know my opinion. I go along with whatever I have to go along with, but I don't usually stick my neck out

to do anything...like I don't understand these iPods and all these things. I don't understand any of that and, I guess, I don't even have any desire for it.

Ice: I think you said you have a special typewriter?

Stratton: I have a large type manual typewriter, but it's wearing out and you cannot buy another one. So, if you ever hear of one, let me know. (Laughter)

Ice: Okay. I bet you've done a lot of work on that.

Stratton: Oh yeah. See, once I was...way back when we just had the Iowa Council of the Blind, not Iowa Council of the United Blind. It was...the Iowa Council was first. I was the Editor, and so I published a paper four times a year. I typed every bit of that up and sent it and got it copied. I used to when we first started; I even used to make the Braille copies. I used to record the recorded ones too. So, I enjoyed that.

Ice: And now you still do some proofreading?

Stratton: I do a lot of proofreading for the Department for the Blind, yes. I love it. I don't know what I would have done without it since Bob is gone, because if I don't know what to do some morning I just sit down and proofread. Then I feel like I'm helping somebody else by doing this. They say these books go all over. They're on the computer and they can go all over. So, I'm really happy that she keeps me busy when she does; that's good. I enjoy it.

Ice: Any particular type of books you like doing best.

Stratton: Oh I don't care. I'm not fussy. I don't care for scientific books. That's not my cup of tea. But a good romance or a good western, it doesn't matter. Just somebody has to proofread them and I do it. Once you proofread, and then you read another book, you can see the mistakes right away in that other book that somebody else has done. You can see them right away.

Ice: Anything else about your experiences as a blind person that you would like to comment on, either family life or community life, education, employment...

Stratton: I don't know. I think sometimes life is a little rough in the fact that...you know if you could just drive. I keep saying, "Oh if I could just drive." Like I miss...I used to have a really good girlfriend and then her husband, because of his work, they moved. That kind of shot that one. Because I took care of her two boys, their two boys too. But she, oh about every week and a half or two weeks, we'd go down to the mall in Davenport. I miss doing things like that. I don't get to do that now.

I have two boys in Dubuque, and they're very good to me. Everybody's too busy. So, I just...I usually send for my clothes now through the catalogs. It's a lot more fun to go with somebody and then eat lunch, spend the whole day. That's the one thing I miss. I miss being with people, doing things. I go to church every week, but that doesn't take care of it all.

Ice: Any additional comments that you have?

Stratton: No, I can't think of any. I don't know if I've given you any good news or not.

Ice: Oh yes. This has been wonderful, and thank you so much for your time and sharing your experiences.

Stratton: Did we get everything?

Ice: I believe we did.

Stratton: Okay.

**39:37
(End of Recording)**

**Deb Brix
March 31, 2011**